

SOURCE: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS, 1999

SINGLE FATHER HAPPY TO EARN KID'S TRUST – UNITED WAY HELPS END CYCLE OF ABUSE

The sound of happy, giggling children fills Robert Giles home. As the single dad tidies up crayons and candy scattered on the kitchen table, he reminds his kids playing downstairs, “no wrestling guys.”

The house radiates love and renewal, and is a world away from the alcohol abuse and domestic violence that once was their home life.

Just four years ago, an alcoholic Giles attacked his common law wife. He grabbed her by the throat as their three children screamed for him to stop.

Charged with domestic violence, Giles went to jail for the fourth time.

This time would be different. His three kids, Bobby, now 8, Byron, 6, and Robin, 5, were taken into custody by Child and Family Services.

To get them back, Giles knew he must quit drinking, rebuild their trust and learn to be a loving parent. Giles himself grew up in an abusive home, and was taken into the care of CFS when he was 15.

He needed to break the cycle – no easy feat.

“I never got any hugs growing up,” he said, as his kids climb all over him. “We get logs of hugs now. They give me hugs and tell me they love me. It feels good.”

Giles, 42, hasn't had a drink in more than two years. He attends a sharing circle that deals with family violence, and volunteers at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. The centre helps Giles stay focused, and is partially funded by the United Way of Winnipeg.

“I teach my kids how to love each other, and that it's OK to say when you're scared,” he said. “I want them to be the best they can be, and let them know it's OK to make a mistake and try again.”

Giles has full custody of his kids. Bobby and Robin both have fetal alcohol syndrome, which is an additional challenge, he said.

They live on social assistance for now, but Giles says he takes the kids on as many outings as he can. This year, they went to the Ice Capades for the first time, and to a Blue Bomber game. They go to a movie “when we can afford it.”

Giles plans to earn his high school diploma and attend university to become a social worker. But right now, he's devoting his time to becoming a better person, and to raising loving kids.

"I'm happy," Giles said, glowing. "They trust me now."

Your United Way donation supports the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre and other local agencies that foster creative approaches to address social issues from a stable base of operations. Call 477-UWAY (8289) to make your pledge or send a gift to 3rd floor, #5 Donald St., Winnipeg Man., R3L 2T4. For regular updates on the 2000 campaign or to pledge on-line, visit their Web site at www.unitedwaywinnipeg.mb.ca